

## 1. Need and Rationale

All of the findings in the Heritage Health Index exist in many of South Dakota's collecting institutions. South Dakota is a large rural state of more than 77,000 square miles and a population of fewer than 790,000. The population is clustered along the state's eastern and western borders, leaving many miles with few people in between. The majority of the state's collections are housed in very small institutions, often run entirely by dedicated volunteers. South Dakota has more than 130 local historical societies/museums, several dedicated archives, 17 interpretive centers, over 25 historic buildings/sites, 11 Native American museums, and 154 public libraries. All of these institutions hold collections of historic value. Most local historical societies and museums are seasonal operations with no climate control in a state where the temperature can fluctuate from -40 to over 100°. While disaster planning is a concern, these institutions focus more on basic collections care.

In January 2008, museum and collections-care professionals met to discuss the IMLS Connecting to Collections Statewide Planning grants. Several needs were identified at the meeting. These included getting better, more inclusive, information about exactly what was in the collections of the state's libraries, museums, and historical societies. (A statewide collections inventory of South Dakota museum and historical society holdings has never been undertaken) The need for improving communication between the entities with emphasis on sharing information about collections care was identified. It also became apparent that the public needed to be better informed about the institutions and their valuable collections so that fundraising efforts for preservation could be pursued more effectively. The lack of disaster planning led to a recommendation to develop a template plan for small institutions and provide training on the subject.

The South Dakota State Library recognizes that many of the 154 public libraries in South Dakota hold local collections of historic value. The State Library understands the importance of identifying these collections and providing local library staffs with the skills to appropriately preserve these collections.

In 2000-01, a grant of \$20,462 from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission allowed the South Dakota State Historical Records Advisory Board to hold a series of public meetings, prepare a strategic plan for South Dakota's historical records, and publish a guide to the state's repositories and records. A survey went to more than 300 archives, libraries, museums, and historical and genealogical societies soliciting information about their holdings. All known repositories were contacted, but some chose not to respond. 160 surveys were returned. The data was used to create the *Guide to Historical Repositories in South Dakota*. The guide provides information about public and private repositories with historical records in the state. The *Guide* was updated and expanded in 2002. The *Guide* is available online at the SDSHRAB website. The State Historical Records Advisory Board also offered free workshops for archivists, librarians, records managers, and museum curators.

The Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society has always been a source of help and information for small museums in the state. Based on the questions from small

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places and the type of help they request, the Museum staff began conducting selected site visits in 2008 to get a clearer picture of the overall needs of the state's small museums. The results were consistent with the findings of the HHI survey. In South Dakota, collections were at risk due to subpar storage conditions, lack of training, and absence of disaster or emergency plans.

To address these problems, representatives of the Association of South Dakota Museums, the South Dakota State Archives, the South Dakota State Museum, the Historic Preservation Office of South Dakota, the South Dakota State Library, and other interested members of the state's museum community met and formed a planning group. The group identified the need for a unified, inclusive assessment of the collections held by organizations throughout the state. This grant will allow the group to develop a comprehensive picture of the state's collections, set up a method to share professional expertise and resources, and plan for future training in collections care and disaster planning for the places holding historic South Dakota collections.

### **2. Planning Process**

The group has organized the South Dakota Connects to Collections Project as a collaborative effort to reach all of the collecting institutions in the state. We are requesting funds from the IMLS Connecting to Collections program in support of this project. The grant funds would be used to conduct a statewide needs assessment survey of collecting institutions and compiling the data into a useable database for future reference and planning. Electronic surveys will be used in the project, but a grant-funded employee doing on-site interviews and collection assessment will do the vast bulk of the work. The on-site visits are crucial since many of the state's collecting institutions lack the electronic links and the necessary assessment skills to provide meaningful answers to an electronic survey.

As the first step in the South Dakota Connects to Collections Project, four informational meetings would be held in May 2009. One meeting would be held in each of the four quadrants of the state, ensuring easy access for participants. The public meetings would explain the Project's goals and the upcoming surveys, indicate possible outcomes, and answer questions. Getting upfront "buy-in" from the institutions the Project hopes to reach is critical and the meetings are a logical way to begin that process.

After the information meetings, the on-site needs assessments will begin, with that part of the project running from May to November 2008. To facilitate setting up the surveys, the South Dakota State Library staff will provide access to their institutional mailing list. They will also promote the project to libraries across the state and encourage their participation. A session on the project will be presented at the South Dakota Library Association meeting to continue spreading the word and soliciting participants. The State Library will have a representative on the project advisory group and will assist with writing the survey. Care will be taken to update, but not duplicate, assessments done by the State Archive Office since 2002.

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The Association of South Dakota Museums will serve as a conduit to the statewide museum community about the South Dakota Connects to Collections Project. Information about project goals, procedures, and progress will be published in the Association newsletter and posted online. The Association's membership list will provide a starting base of contacts for the on-site visits. Information gathered on site visits and the project's final report will be posted on the Association's website.

As a program within the South Dakota State Historical Society, the state's Historic Preservation Office will provide guidelines for assessing any structures that may be part of an institution's collections. This office is already familiar with historic buildings and its expertise can be applied to buildings identified in the survey.

From November 2009 to April 2010, the grant-funded employee will compile the survey information into a database and prepare a final report outlining the significant findings and appropriate steps for future action concerning the state's collections. The report will be disseminated through the communications systems of the Association of South Dakota Museums and the South Dakota Library Association as well as being sent directly to all participating institutions. A series of meetings will be held for participants and the public to present the final report, answer questions, and develop a strategy for implementing steps for improving collections care. The grant-funded employee will also prepare a brochure for the public highlighting the salient facts from the final report to increase awareness and to be used as a tool for soliciting financial support for collections care. The South Dakota Library Association and the Association of South Dakota Museums will present sessions at their professional meetings about the project. The South Dakota State Historical Society plans to introduce statewide Field Services into its programs offered.

### **3. Project Resources: Budget and Personnel**

#### Project Staff:

##### **Helen B Louise, Museum Director of the South Dakota State Historical Society**

Ms. Louise will serve as Project Director providing oversight and serving as the point-of-contact for the entire planning group.

##### **To be filled, Associate Curator of Outreach, South Dakota State Historical Society**

The Associate Curator will attend all meetings, conduct the site visits, compile the database, write the final report, and create the brochure on the grant project.

##### **Colleen Kirby, Continuing Education Coordinator, South Dakota State Library**

Ms. Kirby is a member of the planning group. She will provide and distribute the library portion of the needs assessment survey, plan a session at a SDLA Annual Conference, and encourage libraries to answer the survey. While the State Library has not signed a formal partnership agreement they have committed to the outlined project. They recognize the importance of identifying collections held by local libraries, and providing local library staff with the basic skills needed to appropriately maintain those collections.

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### **Chelle Somsen, State Archivist, South Dakota State Archives**

Ms. Somsen is a member of the planning group. She will provide access to data collected by the State Archives, and provide the technical support for evaluating archival materials found during the survey process.

### **Jason Haug, Director, South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office**

Mr. Haug is a member of the planning group. He will provide the technical support for assessing buildings surveyed throughout the state.

### **Ronette Rumpca, Vice-President, Association of South Dakota Museums**

Ms. Rumpca is the contact person for the partnership with the Association of South Dakota Museums.

### **Daniel Brosz, Curator of Collections, Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society**

Mr. Brosz will provide assistance in setting up the survey tool to collect information in a consistent format during the on-site collections assessment visits.

### Budget:

\$40,000 is requested to fund hiring the Associate Curator of Outreach to conduct the on-site needs assessments, build the database, draft the final project report, and design the public brochure. The Associate Curator would also participate in all meetings concerning the project. Grant funds would be used for salary, travel expenses, supplies and materials, and a laptop computer. The South Dakota State Historical Society will provide a cost-share contribution of \$48,548.89.

### Outcomes and Sustainability:

The South Dakota Connects to Collections Project will provide a solid framework for improving communication among the planning group about South Dakota collections. The project will give surveyed institutions better knowledge about their holdings and how their objects and documents fit into the larger collections picture within the state. The project will continue past the grant period. Members of the planning group intend to develop and offer training in collections care and preservation, and disaster planning and recovery, as dictated by the needs revealed through the surveys. The South Dakota Library Association and the Association of South Dakota Museums will present sessions at their professional meetings about the project. The South Dakota State Historical Society plans to introduce statewide Field Services into its programs offered. One of the most important outcomes for the project will be to increase awareness of the citizens of South Dakota about the historical treasures held by their local institutions and inspire them to offer increased financial support for their care. The history of the state evident in its material objects and archival documents cannot be replaced. The South Dakota Connects to Collections Project will ensure that those objects and documents are preserved for future generations.